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The mediatization of public sex cultures in the case of the hook-up app Grindr

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Along with the normalisation of geo-locative dating and hook-up practices in mainstream publics – through apps like Tinder[1], Bumble[2] and Happn[3] – imaginations of sexual privacy and indeed publicness seem to be changing. This paper focuses on the interplay between media and public sex cultures in the case of the Grindr app[4] use in gay male intimacy cultures. Though gay men's sex practices, vis-à-vis cruising, have historically been thoroughly mobile and mediated, the Internet has brought about new ways of accessing and becoming visible in such cultures (Hollister, 2002). Making oneself visible to the right public (and as importantly invisible to others), now occurs in relation to the affordance structure that apps like Grindr offer.

The paper asks to what extend different gay, public sex cultures are shaped by Grindr's affordance structure, and conversely how different practices represented within the app use the technology in disparate ways. Case material is drawn from interviews performed in London and Brighton in 2014. The cases pertain to two somewhat taboo practice spheres that in the fieldwork nevertheless proved significantly represented in the app interface: 1) that of 'chill-outs' /Party'n'Play (Race, 2014), that is, sex parties in which certain drugs are taken; and 2) that of non-monogamous relationships. Using mediatization theory both the broad, societal dissemination of new communication technologies, as well as the life practices in which they become integral, are addressed. It is argued that mediatization processes mold public sex cultures and non-monogamous relationships in similar ways. Conversely I argue that hook-up apps are simultaneously molded by the cultural systems that they enter. The nudging towards certain actions in the affordance structure is taken up or pushed against in ways that reflect the users' biographically anchored value systems.

Theoretically the paper draws on both cultural and material perspectives on mediatization (Lundby, 2014). André Jansson's division of mediatization into three overlapping socio-spatial regimes (Jansson, 2013) serve as analytically applicable concepts. I identify general changes in

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[1] https://www.gotinder.com

[2] https://bumble.com

[3] https://www.happn.com/en/

[4] http://www.grindr.com

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the experience of *material indispensability*, *premediations*, and *normalised social practice*. Conversely the analysis of practice difference is parsed in the light of the "molding of mediatization" (Jansson, 2015) by looking at how personal biographies partake in the understanding and use of hook-up apps as *social techniques* and/or *cultural properties*.

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